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031113Z Aug 05

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 005307

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/03/2015

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SUBJECT: VILLEPIN STIRS THE POT ON TURKISH EU ACCESSION
NEGOTIATIONS

REF: A. ANKARA 4486

[1](#)B. PARIS 4235

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Josiah B. Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In an August 2 radio interview, PM Villepin appeared to raise the bar for French support for the opening of accession negotiations with Turkey scheduled to begin October 3, saying that, "It doesn't appear to me conceivable that such a negotiation process can be opened with a country that doesn't recognize all the member states of the EU" (i.e., Cyprus). Villepin's position was reportedly supported by President Chirac that morning during the last meeting of the Council of Ministers prior to the summer break. MFA DAS-equivalent for enlargement (DAS-equivalent) Caroline Ferrari told us the same afternoon that while the remarks only represented Villepin's initial reaction to Turkey's declaration, France would want time to share its "analysis" with its European partners before deciding how to proceed. The MFA spokeswoman refused to be drawn out on the issue during yesterday afternoon's press briefing. It is not clear at this point how far France is prepared to go, although Villepin's declaration appears to be a repositioning following the negative French referendum vote as well as prepositioning for the 2007 French Presidential elections. END SUMMARY.

August 2 Remarks - Moving the Goal Posts?

[1](#)2. (U) During an August 2 appearance on Europe 1 radio, when asked whether Turkey's declaration on Cyprus in conjunction with its signing of the protocol to the Ankara Agreement would affect the scheduled October 3 opening of accession negotiations with Turkey, PM Dominique de Villepin responded: "To me, it doesn't appear conceivable that such a process of negotiations could be opened with a country that doesn't recognize each of the EU member states. . . . To re-enter in a negotiation process, whatever be the form, that of course supposes the recognition of each of the members with whom you want to work. Thus there is the principle that appears to me must be defended and it's what France will put forward to Turkey and to the other EU member states during the next meetings in September."

[1](#)3. (U) When pressed on whether negotiations really might not open on October 3, Villepin responded, "Yes. I believe these things should be clear. But we'll talk about this first with the EU member states. You know, France is a country that cares about working in the family that is the EU. There are the meetings of FMs at the beginning of September, there will be the exchanges between Heads of State. Beginning from there, we will determine the French position, and I say it here: it does not appear to me advisable to enter into a negotiating process before Turkey has clearly indicated its will to recognize each of the members of the EU."

[1](#)4. (C) French AFP quickly picked up on the story, noting that Villepin would not back the opening of negotiations with Turkey if the latter did not recognize Cyprus first, a criterion that was not/not included in the Dec. 2004 decision setting the conditions for Turkey to begin negotiations. By the afternoon, AFP was reporting an embarrassed Commission response and quoting an anonymous European diplomat as saying "it's the first time that this condition has been posed to Ankara to open the membership negotiations. To my knowledge, not even Cyprus or Greece have gone so far publicly."

Without Completely Closing the Door (Yet)

[1](#)5. (C) Responding to our request for clarification, Caroline Ferrari, MFA Deputy Director for European enlargement, tried to shift some of the blame to Turkey by arguing that Turkey's decision to issue a "unilateral declaration" accompanying its protocol signature had highlighted its non-recognition of Cyprus. It called into question the basis for the EU's decision to open accession negotiations October 3. She claimed France had been angered by Turkey's declaration. COREPER would meet on August 24 to discuss the declaration and to assess whether the Turkish declaration was

incompatible with the protocol signature. She added that the EU Foreign Ministers would be meeting on September 1 to discuss the issue further. Asked whether France intended to block the opening of accession negotiations unless Turkey formally recognized Cyprus, Ferrari responded, "We want to discuss our analysis with our European partners."

16. (U) In the afternoon press briefing, MFA spokeswoman Cecile Pozzo di Borgo refused any commentary on the issue, while citing the upcoming European meetings at which the French would discuss the issue with their European partners.

But a Shift in the Making

17. (C) There had already been some signs of a changing French position on Turkey even prior to Villepin's radio interview in the wake of the negative French referendum vote. British Embassy contacts told us that Chirac was very negative in his June 14 meeting with Blair in assessing the potential impact on European public opinion of opening membership negotiations with Turkey (ref B). In addition, public remarks by Chirac and Villepin since the referendum, while not explicitly naming Turkey, appear in retrospect aimed at setting the stage for a change in position. Chirac, in a speech given during the June European Council, asked how the Union could continue to expand without having "the institutions capable of making the enlarged Union function efficiently." Villepin went a step farther in a June 15 address to the National Assembly, saying that, "while respecting our commitments, we should definitely open a period of reflection with our partners on the forms of future enlargements."

18. (C) The message was left ambiguous at the time, with Douste-Blazy telling the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Assembly on June 21 that it would not be accurate to affirm that Chirac had changed his view favoring Turkey's accession. Only a day later, however, European Affairs Minister Colonna and Chirac confidante, in remarks to the National Assembly's EU Delegation, said that negotiations with Turkey "will not necessarily finish with membership; a privileged partnership is always an option."

Comment

19. (C) In late July, in conjunction with a conversation on visiting German CDU chief Merkel's visit to Paris, Rainier Daussonville, Villepin's technical counselor for European Affairs, told us that a move by Turkey to loudly broadcast its non-recognition of Cyprus in conjunction with its signature would be "a problem." It now appears that his boss has gone ahead and moved this problem into the public sphere.

Although it is not yet clear at this point to what extent France intends to follow through on its words with other EU member states, GOF motives are transparent. First, Chirac and Villepin are repositioning French policy toward EU enlargement to take account of the failure of the EU constitutional referendum. Unease about enlargement was clearly a major factor in its defeat (which Chirac failed to neutralize through the amendment to the French constitution that will make future accessions subject to popular referenda). Second, Villepin/Chirac are also prepositioning themselves for the 2007 Presidential elections in an attempt to prevent Interior Minister Sarkozy, a long-time opponent of Turkish membership in the EU, from gaining popular advantage on an emotive issue. Finally, we would not rule out a tactical consideration: a rash reaction from Turkey that would spare the EU (and France) a difficult decision at this time and shift the onus for failure onto the Turks. End

Comment.
STAPLETON